



HED affordability within reach

Story by Alexander Kufel

The RIF is off! In an 11th hour turn of events, HED Commander Lt. Col. Wally Z. Walters told an audience of over 200 employees at the Oct. 7 Town Hall meeting that events have overtaken the need for a RIF (reduction-in-force) and HED will be able to proceed toward achieving its correct size without upheaval.

"We are reasonably confident that we will be an affordable organization this fiscal year and that we will be able to execute our mission," said Walters. "This is not a postponement of the RIF. It is a cancellation."

What has changed since he assumed command in July is that income projections for this fiscal year have increased and operating costs have decreased to the extent that HED will not experience a



HED Commander Lt. Col. Wally Z. Walters illustrates a point as he expands on why the RIF is no longer required. Photo by Jim Dung

budget shortfall after all, said Walters.

The original expectation was that HED would miss its budget mark by about \$5 million and that immediate action in the form of "downsizing" the District needed to be taken. A mock RIF was conducted in August that identified 36 positions for deletion or downgrading.

Since then, the Oct. 1 start of a new fiscal year brought with it the reinstatement of \$2 million in project income and additional work has come in from FED and JED as well as \$500,000 for flood damage work in Korea. At the same time, costs have decreased because of attrition to forestall the need for any further RIF action.

Walters said that in addition to 23 people migrating to other jobs outside the District, 15 more people had applied for VSIP (Voluntary Separation Incentive Program) and VERA (Voluntary Early Retirement Authority) by the cutoff date. It was announced after the meeting that VERA authority from the Department of Defense has been received. Walters said that applications for both VSIP and VERA will be honored. He said there was no assurance that the buy-out incentives would be offered again.

The decision not to go ahead with the RIF also was made

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POD helps in hurricane recovery effort

With winds gusting up to speeds of 174 miles-per-hour, Hurricane Georges carved a huge path of destruction in Puerto Rico and the Gulf of Mexico states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Over a dozen members of Pacific Ocean Division deployed, some even before the storm was over, to lend assistance in the recovery effort.

"Due to the extent of the damage, particularly in Puerto Rico, recovery efforts will be going on for a long time," said Ken Suiso, acting chief of Emergency Management Division.

Honolulu Engineer District initially sent its five-member power team consisting of Tom Brady, EM; Clifford Takano, ED; Robert Mueller, CO; Kent Tamai, CT; and Francis Tonaki, LM, to Vicksburg, Miss. Now both Brady and Tonaki are in Puerto Rico. Recently, Kenneth Santiago, LM, and Rudolfo Atoigue, LM, were deployed to

Jacksonville. Takano, Mueller and Tamai have since returned to Hawaii. Mike Lee, ET-C, went to Ponce, Puerto Rico, to assist with re-roofing efforts there.

Steve Philben, chief of Emergency Management Division initially went to Tallahassee, Fla., and is currently in San Juan, Puerto Rico, assisting with ESF-3 operations. Under the Federal Emergency Response Plan, the Corps of Engineers is responsible for coordinating engineering and public works.

From Alaska Engineer District, three individuals were sent to Puerto Rico: Yvonne Drake, CT; Mary Bradley, IM; and Melanie Burg, LM. Ernest Hudson, LM, went to Camp Beauregard, La.

Merv Mullins from Alaska's Emergency Management office went to Washington, D.C., to provide assistance in the USACE Emergency Operations Center.

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Adherence: *Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative.*—Oscar Wilde, Irish author, 1854-1900

Homeowners assistance still available

Demonstrating that the economic impact of base closures is not something to be taken lightly, the Homeowners Assistance Program (HAP) was developed as a means to minimize consequences for federal government employees forced to sell their homes. In Hawaii alone, the program has received 656 applications since its implementation in the spring of 1997. (*The Pacific Connection*, November/December 1997 issue.)

HAP purchases homes outright or provides payment that can help fill the gap between purchase price and current market value. The Hawaii program is being administered by the Sacramento Engineer District with technical support by HED (Honolulu Engineer District). In its support role, HED provides on-site appraisal data to Sacramento as well as assistance to help get the homes in marketable condition.

"We've seen a real decline in Hawaii property values in recent years, but there certainly hasn't been a decline in people's interest," said Elizabeth Easley, chief of the benefits section at Sacramento's HAP office. "We do more than simply help dispose of a home when a facility is closing, we actually help people to relocate for future employment."

According to figures provided by the Sacramento office, to date 108 Hawaii homes have been acquired by the program and 50 have already been resold. The remaining 58 are being managed by HED and are either available or currently being prepared for sale. Payment can be an amount up to the difference between 95 percent of the fair market value prior to the announcement dates based on the closure of Barbers Point Naval Air Station and the appraised value at sale time. Jill Tomishima, HED's HAP coordinator, said that because there has been so much interest locally, her role has expanded from that of providing preliminary evalu-

ations to Sacramento to assisting with post-closing maintenance and repair, and procuring services such as utility activation, house-, yard- or pool-cleaning, repairs to windows, plumbing, house wiring or appliances, carpentry, painting, fumigation and even carpeting to place property in sellable condition. She also functions as coordinator between applicants, contractors, realtors and the Sacramento HAP office.

Eligible individuals who qualify for benefits under HAP can receive them by having the government buy the home by paying off the mortgage, by being reimbursed by the government for part of the loss from selling the home or by receiving assistance if the homeowner defaults on the mortgage.

HAP guidelines state that prior to enrollment in the program, the homeowner has to assemble proof of ownership, transfer orders, or a separation letter, or even retirement orders, together with receipts from the utility company verifying that the applicant occupied the house being sold on the date of the base closure or realignment announcement. In the case of Oahu, those dates are April 12, 1991; March 12, 1993; or May 1, 1995 according to Mary Jorgenson, chief of the Relocation Services Branch in Sacramento.

HAP will accept applications through Sept. 30, 1999. Easley said that applications received after that date must be accompanied by a letter explaining why the original deadline couldn't be met.

USACE is executive agent of the program for the entire Department of Defense and the Coast Guard. The California HAP office is one of three nationwide, with others in Ft. Worth, Texas, and Savannah, Ga. All homeowner's queries and applications must be made directly to Sacramento. To start the process, call the toll free number: 1-800-811-5532 or visit HAP online at www.usace.army.mil/.

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because of the District's determination that 11 of the positions that were formally identified for abolishment now will be required or supported with the increased workload. Those include slots for project managers, construction representatives, design manager, maintenance worker and EEO representative and six positions related to the flood work in Korea.

"RIF action is a tool that is used to adjust the size of an organization," said Walters. "And, like a sledgehammer, it is difficult to use. Especially now when we are trying to tune something the size of a watch."

Although the threat of a RIF is past, said Walters. HED still needs to complete its downsizing, noting that the organization has been on a "glide path" down to its correct size since 1994. He also said that HED needed to reduce operating costs by examining its processes and complete its physical separation from POD. In the immediate future are plans to renovate building 525 so that HQ POD can move to the third floor there and so that HED can vacate building T-1, which is scheduled for demolition.

Walters also said that there is no question that a RIF, and even a mock RIF, is divisive and everyone needs to mend the "Ohana" and take care of each other.